

Transcript of Partnership Between Food & Drug Administration and WebMD

FTS-HHS FDA

**Moderator: Scott McFarland
December 3, 2008
10:00 am CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode. During the question and answer session please press star 1 on your phone.

Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. And I'll now turn the meeting over to (Judy Leon). Thank you. You may begin.

Judy Leon: Thank you operator. My name is Judy Leon. I'm the Director of the Office of Public Affairs for the Food & Drug Administration. I'd like to welcome you all to our teleconference today. And we will be holding a briefing on an important partnership that we're rolling out between the Food & Drug Administration and WebMD.

Our two speakers this afternoon depending on where you are in the world are FDA Commissioner Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach and Mr. Wayne Gattinella, CEO for WebMD.

After the opening remarks we will have a brief question and answer segment for credentialed media. We will take one question and one follow-up. We ask that you identify yourself by name and by media affiliation.

At this time I would like to turn the call over to Dr. von Eschenbach.

Andrew von Eschenbach: Good morning everyone. And I want to particularly begin by thanking you for taking the time to be with us this morning.

I'm actually calling you from Singapore where I'm participating in the third summit of the heads of medicine's regulatory agencies around the world.

But it was extremely important to me personally to be a part of this very, very important announcement.

Most of you know that over the past few years I have continuously emphasized the importance of communication and the commitment of the Food & Drug Administration to pursuing every opportunity that we had to enhance our ability to effectively communicate with the public that we serve.

And this morning we're very, very excited and enthusiastic to share with you the news of a very important partnership with WebMD that's going to enable the FDA to contribute to bringing to millions of people timely product safety alerts and important health information.

And to do this in a way that is making use of innovative technologies and the increasing importance of the Web and the Internet as a source of providing information to the public.

And to do it in partnership with WebMD which we'll hope will be the first of

many such partnerships with others, but particularly with WebMD at the outset because it has been an organization that like the Food & Drug Administration is very person focused or patient centric if you will, really putting first and foremost, the person, the patient, the public that we serve in the center of whatever our each individual activity and mission is.

So to join with a partner who shares with us that value of putting the public first, the patient first is really an important opportunity and component of this.

And secondly I think we all recognize that WebMD has been a leader with regard to innovation and the use of the Web as a form of communication and service to the public.

What we will do and by virtue of this partnership with WebMD that has the ability now to reach out to near to almost 50 million unique visitors each month and has WebMD the magazine that can reach 9 million readers is to really be able to partner to present online the publishing of FDA consumer updates and to do that in a way that is free of advertisements but it provides important content material that we believe at the FDA is extremely important for consumers to be aware of as they're making critically important decisions for themselves and for their families about their health and the products that they use to ensure and preserve that health.

In addition to our activities in providing content on the Web, we'll also be working with regard to providing FDA consumer updates that will be featured in the WebMD the magazine.

These will provide then overall timely and easy to read articles about the safety of FDA regulated products and for example food safety tips and advice on avoiding medication mistakes. But it'll be done in a way that puts the

patient or the public at the center and the core of this and is sensitive and appropriate for what is the most effective way to communicate with them.

We believe that this will be an evolving process. What you're seeing right now in terms of the launch of this partnership is really the first step in emerging content. We expect over the next three months to produce 50 FDA consumer updates on WebMD online over the next year and plus have featured articles in WebMD the magazine at least three times a year.

So it's a long step forward in FDA's commitment to protect and promote the public health. It's an effort that will lay out a path for future partnerships and future opportunities to extend the Food & Drug Administration information for the public and we believe will provide a very, very significant service in enhancing our communications with the public.

And I want to now turn this presentation over to Mr. Wayne Gattinella the CEO of WebMD to give you their perspective on the importance of the FDA WebMD collaboration. Wayne?

Wayne Gattinella: Thank you Dr. von Eschenbach. I am - I too am out of the country. I'm in London and had the opportunity to present this morning at the Global Pharmaceutical and Biotech conference here. So thank you for joining us this morning.

We too at WebMD are very excited to be partnering with the FDA in this very unique collaboration that for the first time will provide tens of millions of Americans with access to the agency's content within the trusted environment of WebMD.

As our brand at WebMD has evolved, we've witnessed a tremendous

movement towards health and wellness that is playing a role in all aspects of consumers' lives.

So whether it relates to the drugs that we take or the food that we eat or even the cosmetic products that we use, consumers are becoming much more involved in their overall health and wellbeing.

And this partnership between WebMD and the FDA is an important collaboration that further bridges that intersection of health, wellness and prevention.

I think the partnership is significant because it combines FDA's role as one of the most important consumer health and safety organizations with WebMD's position as the most recognized and trusted brand of health information that together will help further protect the health of all Americans.

It will significantly enrich the WebMD user experience in categories that are important to public health such cosmetics, food and product safety.

So as you - as we look towards what we are announcing today which is just the first phase of our joint initiative, this phase offers a new online consumer health information resource center on WebMD that will provide consumers access to FDA's timely information on safety of food, medicine and cosmetic topics that are of high interest to consumers.

It will also bring FDA public health alerts to WebMD's large user base with the potential to reach tens of millions of Americans with timely alerts at, you know, the click of a button.

It will help inform users on how they can report problems that they may be

experiencing directly.

And finally in this first phase it will feature polls that are developed specifically for the FDA based on topics of interest most relevant to the nation's health and well-being.

As Dr. von Eschenbach mentioned in this phase, it will also encompass FDA contributions to WebMD the magazine which is our bi-monthly magazine that is distributed to 85% of the physician's offices across the country reaching roughly another 9 million consumers.

And then finally WebMD's information and content and contributions will be on fda.gov in the form of content links that will bring you back to the FDA area on WebMD.

The second phase of our partnership that we'll launch in - over the next 90 days will then feature a much deeper consumer integration user experience, the use of personalization video and other technologies that will - that are designed to create even higher levels of user engagement and interaction with this information.

So for more than ten years WebMD's mission has been to provide all Americans with access to the most credible and relevant health information with a focus on wellness and prevention.

And at WebMD we support and certainly commend Commissioner von Eschenbach and the whole FDA team in this very unique effort to reach all Americans with the information that they need to better manage their health.

So with that I'd like to turn it back to Judy who will help facilitate any

questions that you may have.

Judy Leon: Okay, thank you very much Mr. Gattinella. Operator that this time we will take the first question.

Operator?

Coordinator: We will now begin the question and answer session. Please press star 1.

Okay and I do show a question from (Ricardo) with the Associated Press.
Your line is open.

(Ricardo): Thanks for taking my question. Yes, I just - I wanted to know exactly how this will work. Is it on WebMD is it like going to be a link to the FDA Web site or are we talking about content that's developed specifically for WebMD by the FDA? And I have a follow-up question.

Judy Leon: It sounds to me that that question would go to Mr. Gattinella. And I've asked reporters to specifically direct your question to either Dr. von Eschenbach or Mr. Gattinella or both.

So Mr. Gattinella, it seems to me that's a question for you.

Wayne Gattinella: Thank you for the question (Ricardo). It - so we are a building and actually today delivering an FDA exclusive area on WebMD that is dedicated to FDA consumer content.

As Dr. von Eschenbach indicated, that area will be free from advertising. It's designed to be, you know, a special consumer health information area on our site.

There will be links across the areas - across WebMD that will alert and help try to navigate that content. We will feature that content in our direct electronic newsletters that we send to our WebMD user base.

And then finally there will be links on the FDA site that will also help alert and link consumers to that area on WebMD.

(Ricardo): Okay, thank you.

Andrew von Eschenbach: (Ricardo)?

(Ricardo): And yes go ahead...

Andrew von Eschenbach: (Ricardo), let me follow-up with that from the perspective that the content that will be displayed in that - on that Web site is content that will be determined by the FDA based on what our priorities are with regard to important and timely communication and also reflecting the inputs that we get with regard to consumer's interest and consumer's needs.

So we'll do that in a collaborative way. But the content and the responsibility for the content will be FDA's and it will emanate through our communications council and our internal process.

(Ricardo): Okay, thank you. And my follow-up question is for your Commissioner. And just following-up on something that's been in the headlines recently. And that's the finding of traces of melamine in infant formula here in the US.

Is FDA also testing a broader range of dairy products and other consumer food products for melamine contamination?

Judy Leon: You know, (Ricardo), I'm going to take that question. We did a teleconference last week with Dr. Sundloff. And I will be happy to set up a follow-up interview with you. But we really want to keep the topic of this focused to the WebMD topic. So operator, we will take the next question.

Coordinator: Next question comes from (Ryan Hartman). Your line is open.

(Ryan Hartman): Hi. Could you tell me a little more about these polls that you mentioned?
Thank you.

Wayne Gattinella: Yes I think the - this is Wayne Gattinella. The intent and objective here is to provide the FDA with access to billions of consumers who they can then pull in almost a real-time fashion much like we already do today for other topics as a means of either learning more about a particular area of interest that the FDA organization is focusing on.

But it really becomes an area of, you know, for the organization itself to determine what's most relevant to them.

And over the past few years we at WebMD have really begun to use interactive polling and simple question and answers as a way of both involving consumers more in related topics but also just really finding out more about how they're thinking about those topics as well.

And on our site as people have certainly - you know, trust our brand, they know that we're not collecting information with intent to share it externally, we're finding just a - you know, a high level of user engagement in these kinds of interactive tools.

(Ryan Hartman): Great. Dr. von Eschenbach, could you just talk briefly about how that information might be useful to the FDA? How do you - do you plan on using these interactive poll results?

Andrew von Eschenbach: Sure. Let me put it in the context of my experience as a physician where I learned very early that it really wasn't important what I said. What was most important is what the patient heard.

I think FDA has to be very sensitive to not just what we are communicating but how that communication is being received, what the consumer is - perspective is.

And we need to find innovative ways of being sensitive to the consumer that we're serving to learn more from them about the information we're communicating, about the concerns that are most relevant to them and be able to use that in a way that we then more effectively communicate and frame our messages to them and our content of our messages.

So that kind of feedback information from the public will be an extremely important way for us to make our communications much more strategic and effective.

Judy Leon: Okay thank you. Operator we will take the next caller.

Coordinator: Next question comes from Ben Comer. Your line is open.

Ben Comer: Hi. This question is for Wayne. I...

Judy Leon: Excuse me, could you identify your media outlet?

Ben Comer: Yes. My media outlet is Medical Marketing and Media Magazine.

Wayne, I just wanted to find out how you plan to market this partnership in terms of marketing it for yourself and for the FDA?

Wayne Gattinella: We intend to promote the FDA area on WebMD through home page promotion - on WebMD's home page through links in content areas that are relevant to what the current FDA, you know, content and articles are about as we will be collaborating on any particular safety alerts that the FDA is issuing.

We will feature those alerts in the FDA area. But again we will provide links in the most relevant areas.

Someone asked a question earlier about something related to parenting or infant food. So if there was an issue with respect to that we would promote it in the parenting area.

We will alert and inform people of the FDA articles through our online newsletters. And as we mentioned, WebMD's magazine which carries a lot of content and information that relates people back to our site will also be an area of collaboration.

Judy Leon: Okay Ben, did you have a follow-up?

Ben Comer: No, that's all I had. Thanks.

Judy Leon: Okay operator, we will take the next caller please.

Coordinator: Next question's Malcolm Spicer FDC. Your line is open.

Malcolm Spicer: Hello gentlemen. This question is for Dr. von Eschenbach. As far as the capability to bring FDA public health alerts to registered WebMD users who request it, how could that capability have been used let's say recently with the melamine issue and earlier this year with the contaminated Heparin problem?

Andrew von Eschenbach: Well I think and one of the things it's worth re-emphasizing is that this is one part of multiple opportunities that we hope to continue to pursue and explore. We've used our own Web site for example as a portal for being able to get alerts and information to both patients as well as to healthcare providers.

So I think what it is is an expansion of our ability to connect to the public and get the information to them in the most efficient and timely and effective way possible.

So whether it's, you know, the issue of an outbreak of a food illness or concern over a contaminated product or the availability of a new innovative solution to a disease process, I think we're looking at a multiple - a multiplex way of trying to get that information to the public. And this is one more of the those opportunities.

Malcolm Spicer: Yes, my follow-up would be the FD - the agency already does have some capability for consumers to request updates sent to them from the Web site.

Andrew von Eschenbach: I'm sorry, I didn't understand that.

Malcolm Spicer: The FDA already has some capability in its Web site to allow consumers to request public health alerts or other messages.

Andrew von Eschenbach: Yes. But what I'm trying to emphasize is I think we want to

expand the capabilities on multiple fronts. Because I think the more we can find new and better avenues for doing that the more effective we're going to be overall in serving the public.

So I don't see it as exclusive. And I don't see that it has, you know, that simply it's not duplicating. But I think it's complementary to and we'll continue to expand that complementary portfolio.

Judy Leon: Okay thank you. Operator we'll take the next caller please.

Coordinator: John Geever with MedPage Today. Your line is open.

John Geever: Yes hi. It's John Geever with MedPage Today. It's a question for I guess either Mr. Gattinella or Dr. von Eschenbach. Will any of this content be exclusive to WebMD in any way that is not available at FDA's own Web site or just made available sooner at WebMD than elsewhere?

And the question would apply to the magazine articles as well as to what's on the Web site.

Andrew von Eschenbach: Well the content may vary for example in the magazine articles, but not to the point that it's exclusive. And this not intended to be an exclusive relationship by any means or under any circumstances.

We would expect for example, to pursue these kinds of opportunities on many other fronts.

But I think what we want to do is to make the most effective use of the particular partnership or the particular opportunity.

There may be certain messages that will be extraordinarily appropriate for this particular kind of venue. And we may be communicating a different version of that or a different aspect of that particular issue in some other way.

So in a sense I think what we're talking about is we want to inform the public. We want to be carrying on an ongoing dialogue of communication or information. And we will tailor the message or we will fashion the message depending upon the portal or the opportunity that we have whether it's, you know, a Web presentation or whether it's a written presentation or whatever.

We - so I don't think it's exclusive in terms of giving any one a sort of proprietary type of relationship. But it may be a message that's fashioned or presented in a unique way but not in a proprietary kind of way.

Judy Leon: And John, did you have a follow-up?

John Geever: Yes, I guess at least for the time being it does sound like it is somewhat exclusive since this is the only organization that you have a relationship with.

Is there any precedence for FDA working with, you know, a private for-profit media outlet in this way? And have your - does your office vetted this and this is all legal?

Andrew von Eschenbach: There is no legal impediment to the relationship as it's been developed in the memorandum of understanding as to how this process would unfold.

I think what we have essentially done is to take advantage of a mutual interest and have a partner who has extraordinary capability and capacity and expertise that can foster the FDA's mission to protect and promote the public

health.

I think it would be a failure on FDA's part to not be pursuing these opportunities. And as I emphasized before and I want to reemphasize, WebMD may be the first of many of these kinds of opportunities that present themselves across the whole range of media.

But at the same time there's always a first and there's always a beginning. And I think we're very fortunate and to have as our first partner in this type of an adventure a partner that has and can bring to this the kind of extraordinary expertise and capacity that WebMD happens to have.

So I don't see it as being anything that creates a relationship that would have legal implications. And I don't believe that's a problem.

Judy Leon: Okay thank you. Operator, we have time for just one more question.

Coordinator: And the next question then is Andrea Bruce with CBS Evening News. Your line is open.

Andrea Bruce: Hi. Good morning. This is sort of along the lines of the previous question. You know, there are poor medical information outlets and very good ones. And it would appear - I mean it doesn't even appear. This is an obvious endorsement of the FDA for WebMD as a go to source for people to answer health and medical questions.

Is this your case? I mean why WebMD over all others? Is this the best place for consumers to go for medical questions anyway because the FDA has endorsed it? Do you see what I'm getting at?

I mean you are basically putting a kind of seal of approval on this one site versus all others. And how do we know that...

Andrew von Eschenbach: I don't think it's - yes. I don't think this should be construed as FDA putting a seal of approval on WebMD. I think it's construed as a WebMD providing a portal of opportunity where there is a - an FDA page on that Web site.

And that page is free of advertising. It's content is determined by the FDA. And it provides an opportunity for people who are accessing the WebMD Web site to get information directly from the Food & Drug Administration.

And where there are other portals or other opportunities to do that, we will pursue those as well.

So it's - I don't think it's any different than any other mechanism that we've used to disseminate information.

Judy Leon: Andrea did you have a follow-up?

Andrea Bruce: Well no, fair enough. But I mean I think to the consumer and the mom at home it looks like oh well the FDA is partnering with WebMD.

Therefore if I've got questions about acne, hypertension and cancer, really the first place to go to might be WebMD versus the American Society of Oncologists or what have you.

You see what I mean? It's a perception thing here. And so I was wondering how you decided WebMD versus others as your first portal?

Andrew von Eschenbach: Well I think the process began through discussions and I - (Jason) who's been a part of the development of this probably can give you the more specific answers as to the historical evolution of this.

But WebMD has expressed an interest in working together with FDA. We have been pursuing a variety of opportunities to expand our capacity to communicate and disseminate information with the public.

And this just happens to have been an opportunity that's matured to the point where we actually have an initiative.

But I've been carrying on conversations with a whole host of organizations and entities that are engaged in information sharing, information technologies and communications.

And this is one that's matured to the point where we have an initiative and we have a basis to move forward and actually produce product if you will.

And I think it's the first step. It's the first step of what can be, you know, a number of opportunities. And hopefully others will take note of this and come forward with their enthusiastic interest in creating a similar kind of relationship with the FDA.

Judy Leon: Okay, thank you very much. I'm afraid we are out of time. I want to thank everybody for their time and attention and calling in. Thank Dr. von Eschenbach and Mr. Gattinella.

And I will remind callers that a replay of the call will be available for about an hour until December 10.

To listen to the replay, callers in the United States can dial 888-566-0133.
And the pass code is 4650.

Again, we'd like to thank you all for joining us today. And that concludes our
teleconference.

END